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The Cuban Affair

THOSE who proclaim the failure of the invasion of Cuba as the most devastating defeat for the United States in recent years should take into account the total background of our relations with Castro. That the effort failed, none will deny. That it was wholly the fault of our blundering is open to serious debate.

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has been knee-deep in Cuban affairs since 1959, according to The Nation. Time magazine placed the cost of our work in connection with Cuban affairs at between \$135,000 and one-half million monthly over a long period.

Whatever part was taken on behalf of the United States appears to have been directed by the CIA, the most secret of all agencies of government. So secret has been the work of the CIA that most members of congress know little about it. CIA was organized in 1947 as a necessity in coping with the tight espionage systems of totalitarian countries. It was, at best, reluctantly organized. This nation, because of its very nature, never has been very adept at such things.

But CIA was given a relatively free hand. It was the one agency about which there was almost no publicity. Nothing is said about it unless glaring failure makes impossible the keeping of secrets.

This happened in the case of the U-2 plane and again this month in Cuba.

The two incidents raise a major policy issue. Should CIA be solely an intelligence agency without power to initiate or execute action? This probably will come before congress shortly. The point is whether CIA should be confined to investigation and reports to state and defense departments, or directly to the president.

But, in this pattern, the secrecy sometimes necessary in international operations might be lost, for neither state nor defense has been very skillful in keeping secrets.

Whatever the decision, we still shall have to deal with Castro. Perhaps too much weight has been placed on the matter of "face". The Cuban fiasco certainly will come up when our delegates on May 24 go to the inter-American conference of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Quito, Ecuador. But we may have gained more than we have lost by the recent failure. All the world knows that had this country thrown its weight back of the invasion, the effort would have succeeded. The fact that we didn't join militarily in the action should be pleasing to other Latin Americans who usually are fearful of the big North American neighbor.

Much more important is how to prevent Cuba from falling wholly into Communist hands. Face-saving is less important to big than to little nations. Every elephant has been stung by flies without suffering very great damage.